

an observer would naturally seek there the name of some Red-headed Woodpecker, Cedarbird, Redstart, or Fly-catching Warbler which had attracted his or her attention.

The untitled portion following the field-key takes up in systematic order (following the sequence of the A. O. U. Check-List) the species mentioned in the key, and describes, somewhat in detail, but very interestingly, their salient characteristics of habits, voice, etc. Several statements in this portion of the work may, however be fairly questioned while others require correction. Of Grebes, it is said (p. 86) that they "are quite helpless on land. They can not even stand erect on their toes . . . but when resting, support themselves on the whole length of the foot or tarsus." Grebes, however, are not only able to stand erect on their toes, and frequently do so, but walk also in this position. Plovers are characterized as differing from Snipe in possessing "three instead of four toes"; a very erroneous diagnosis, since several genera of Plovers possess a well-developed hallux while some Snipe have none! Woodpeckers are said (p. 136) to be "represented in all the wooded parts of the world except Australia and Madagascar." They are quite wanting also in New Guinea, New Zealand, and the whole of Polynesia, and a recent high authority states that no species of the family is known to have occurred in Egypt. Young Hummingbirds are likened to "a tangle of tiny pink limbs and bodies" (p. 149). Are young Hummingbirds, even when newly hatched, ever pink? Those that I have seen were very dark-colored—a sort of livid gray or slate-color.

The particular points to which attention is called above are, of course, comparatively trivial inaccuracies. Not so, however, the statement (on page 2) that birds, like reptiles, have the heart three-chambered, since it is well-known that in this respect birds agree with mammals (which have a four-chambered heart) and not with reptiles.

These criticisms of 'Bird-Life' are not made in any captious spirit, but to show that the book, like practically all others, is not wholly free from faults. It may truthfully be said that 'Bird-Life' is a book which will prove most useful to those requiring the kind of information which it professes to give, and which no other book supplies in so concise and entertaining a form. The illustrations are, in the main, excellent, and of course add greatly to both the utility and attractiveness of the volume.—R. R.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

The A. O. U. Check-List.

EDITORS OF 'THE AUK':—

Dear Sirs:— I have been much impressed with Dr. Coues's arraignment of the arrangement of our present Check-List—having felt for some time its deficiencies, but scarcely daring to hope for its improvement. While, of course, aware of the real difficulties in the way and the clash of opinions that must arise when the anchors are raised, I believe that there is a call now not only for a rearrangement of the genera and species in many places, but that, in some instances, this should extend to the families—just possibly to an order or two.

With our present sequence of orders, many of the families, as they now stand, express a propinquity or continuity of kinship that is not always the sequence of the probable development; and the question may arise in some minds, which of these two relationships is the more important. But in most cases the interests may both be as well or better expressed by the newer arrangement. Thus in the Paludicolæ, while the Rallidæ are certainly the lowest or nearest the *Apteryx* and the Podicipidæ, yet in our linear arrangement they are not contiguous to either of these groups; but since they precede the Limicolæ, their high position in their own order places them rightly as the next of kin to this order above. While this may seem a rather 'natural' gradation the position of the Jacanidæ in the Limicolæ, viewed from either standpoint, seems preposterous, when we recall how Ralline is its structure. If we had in our North American birds any of the many connecting links that lie between the Limicolæ and the Herodiones, the Jacanidæ might be crowded away from the lower edge of its order by the stronger claims of these; but our presumption is that our list expresses the best sequence of our own birds.